

JENNIFER GIVHAN

Jeremiah Growing

My son helps heal my tattoo,
scrubs his hands & under his fingernails
with antibacterial soap he'll then rub
onto the still-raw feather pen sprouting into birds

across my shoulder blade. He cups
his bicycle-calloused hands with warm
water & splashes me, losing most of the water
to the sink. Again & again he'll do this

so I'm reminded of the hotel basin I first
bathed him in, waiting for adoption papers
in an unfamiliar city, its fireflies I'd never seen,
its late-night summer sunsets. Days ago,

before the sunburn of ink
stinging my skin, he asked to meet
his birthmama, to talk to her.
It feels like I have two mamas, he said

of his heart. I texted her for permission
& she said, *I'd never say no to you—*
He's afraid he'll wash away
my tattoo he's called beautiful, how I was afraid

as she handed him to me—*we're bound for life.*
When she called, when he saw her face
across the screen, he clutched me tighter
& asked *Mama, what should I say?*